



EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

Creating Extraordinary

Quality of Work Life, Customer Benefits, Business Results

BUILDING CHAMPIONSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

What Business Can Learn From the Sports World

By Don Yates

Everyone in business wants to achieve success. That means working effectively together to produce the results that define success for any particular enterprise. If we look at sports, both individual and team, we find a number of factors that lead to championship playing. These same factors are also necessary to win in the business world, but performance generally lags well behind sports on all of them. As a business leader it is up to you to assess your own organization on each of these factors to see if your performance will produce the success you want. [You will find a rating sheet for doing this is at the end of this article.]

A Wellness Mindset

In personal health, business, and sports there is a mindset we can call *wellness*. Most people have progressed from approaching their personal health as curing illness to preventing illness through steps like immunization shots, exercise, diet, and the like. A growing number of people are moving past prevention toward *wellness*—doing whatever is necessary to be in peak health and vitality and living life to the fullest. However, the medical establishment still deals primarily with cure and prevention. Therefore, those seeking wellness are turning to non-medical practitioners like fitness trainers, nutritionists, and homeopathic practitioners.

In strong contrast to this is the arena of sports—not just professional sports, all sports. The players on every sports team I have ever seen as well as people involved in individual sports like golf and tennis are into *Wellness* with a capital W. They are always striving to be the very best they can physically, mentally, and competitively. Yes, they have weaknesses they want to “cure”; but they find them in their search for excellence as opposed to waiting around for them to show up. Prevention is irrelevant because they are always looking to improve not maintain their performance. Championship playing starts with a mindset of wellness — constantly striving to be as good as you possibly can be.

The same mindset, what we might call *organizational wellness*, is necessary to be a champion in the business world. What is the mindset in your organization? Are you usually in the cure mode — “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it?” If people are coming to work and pretty much getting the job done, does that mean it “ain’t broke?” Are you paying attention to prevention because you want to hang on to your people through offering perks like fancy coffee, free dinners, onsite fitness facilities and the like. Or are you seriously trying to develop a truly vital organization that is maximizing both results and the work experience of those producing them.

People Determine Results

Sports players are very clear—they, not the mechanics of the sport, determine results. Most sports have very little in the way of mechanics, that is the tools and equipment, methods, and processes used by the players. There are golf clubs, tennis rackets, balls, bats, and gloves. In some cases technology keeps improving them in an attempt to enhance the skill of players. In some cases, such as

football uniforms, the technology is aimed primarily at enhancing safety not performance. Players do use various methods, but mostly these have to do with how to use their body and mind most effectively. Players also follow some processes and plays. However, in many games like basketball, soccer, and tennis, the game is so fluid that there is little in the way of set plays; and players must constantly adapt to ever changing conditions. Regardless of the amount of “mechanics” involved, all players know their personal effort and skill will determine the final results. As a result, they are constantly working on their physical conditioning, their skills, and their mental approach to the game—they are constantly reaching for wellness through personal development as opposed to relying on improved mechanics.

Does your organization put its major emphasis on mechanics or on people? Are your tools and equipment designed to replace people or to use only their most basic skills or to help them attain new levels of achievement? Are your methods more about how to make the work itself flow more efficiently or to enhance the capability of people? Are your processes designed to eliminate individual decision-making and to limit individual initiative and creativity or to enable everyone participate to their fullest? Do your processes help people be fully engaged or impede their action through rigidity and control? It is clear that the mechanics of sports play the minor part, the players the major one. Which comes first in your organization?

Purpose

Sports players are very clear that they are playing for their own benefit. This may take different forms. A player may want the thrill of winning, the challenge in playing, better health, or even money. In every case, though, it is clear players play for personal benefit. Even in a team sport each individual takes the team win as a personal win and a team loss as a personal loss. Whatever it is they are after, fame, glory, money, or whatever, it is never to make money for shareholders or even to take care of customers. Even in professional sports the players’ primary concern is not making money for the owner. They are out there for their own ends. Understanding this means that every person is highly motivated to do well all the time.

In your business does benefit to the individual come first? The most commonly stated purpose for “playing” business is to make a profit for someone else, not to benefit the individuals doing the playing. Is that true for you? Are your “players” told they are there to serve the customer, the stockholder, “the company,” or “all stakeholders?” Or is it clear that your players are expected to think of themselves first in the way that sports players do.

Goals and Objectives

Not only are sports players clear on why they are playing, they are very clear about their goals and objectives while playing. Every player knows the ultimate goal is a win or a top performance, and they know how that is measured and when they have reached it. They also know intermediate objectives such as first downs, or where the next golf shot must land, or making it through the next qualifying game in a tournament. Is everyone in your organization clear on their goals and objectives and those of the company as a whole? Are they clear on how those goals and objectives are measured and when they actually achieve them?

Roles and Responsibilities

In the same way sports players are clear on goals and objectives, they are clear on roles and responsibilities. Every player has a particular function, and each knows that function well. Furthermore, there is little, if any, overlap between functions. If there is, the players are clear on that as well. For example, the shortstop and second baseman in baseball know when each is responsible for covering second base. Is everyone in your organization clear on his or her function? Are there any activities for

which two people think they are responsible? Or are there tasks that no one sees as her or his responsibility. Do overlaps occur frequently without clarity between those crossing boundaries as to who is responsible at any given time?

Mutual Accountability

In team sports every player is accountable to every other player. You know you cannot succeed unless you all succeed. Helping each other to perform well is a given. Does everyone in your organization feel accountable to everyone else, or are people mostly looking out for number one. Are those below held accountable by those above but the reverse is not true? Do people see helping each other be successful as essential? Does every player trust their fellow players so they can win as a team?

Communication

In team sports communication is constant and open to all. Everyone can see and hear what is going on. Players constantly give each other information on what is happening and what needs to happen. No team succeeds without tremendous communication. Are communications in your organization constant and open to all? Is some information restricted to just certain people? Are there any individuals who hold on to information because they want to maintain control? Does anyone refuse to communicate because they do not trust others to use the information wisely? Do people have difficulty communicating because they work in separated locations?

Rules

Players in sports know the rules of the game they are playing, and everyone is playing by the same rules. Not only that, the rules for any particular sport are the same no matter where it is played. Furthermore, the enforcement of these rules is generally left in the hands of an objective, non-involved outsider. Therefore, every player can concentrate on what is important—how to achieve peak performance within the boundaries of consistent and equal rules. Are your people always clear about the rules of the game? Is your organization free of politics or do they make the rules different for different people? Is enforcement of rules clear and unbiased or uncertain and personal because those doing the enforcing are also involved players themselves? Because rules almost always vary from company to company, do you find new members of your company are having to learn new rules when they join your team?

Role of Coaches

Sports coaches are very clear that their role is to help the players reach the absolute highest level of performance possible both individually and as a team. There is no superior/subordinate relationship between coaches and players. They have different roles that are of equal importance. Actually, if you look at relative salaries in professional sports, coaches often come off as being of less value. During a game their primary role is generally as an objective viewer helping to maximize the performance of the players individually and collectively. They only win if the team wins. You don't see coaches of losing teams getting much praise.

Are your leaders and managers also players expected to carry out activities that are part of the game? Do people "report" to the leader or manager rather than the leader or manager being responsible for helping them reach top performance? Have any of your leaders and managers ever been promoted even when their "team" has lost, or have losses ever been blamed on the team?

Training of Coaches, Leaders, and Managers

Sports coaches have trained to be coaches. Many of them have never been really great players. Some have not even played much at all. What they have done is study coaching, often taking courses in it. They generally have spent years of apprenticeship learning the skills of helping others become great players. Have any of your people become leaders or managers not through learning about leading or managing but rather through being good at the mechanics of their particular business? How many have had a great deal of actual training in managing and leading? Has their apprenticeship been served more to learn the actual mechanics of the work itself or how to lead or manage?

Practice Versus Playing

In most sports the time spent in preparing to actually play a contest far exceeds the actual playing time. Even in a personal sport like golf, many people spend more time on the practice range than in actual play. How much time do people in your organization spend on getting better at what they are doing? Is this time considered an expense that is to be controlled? How large is your people-development budget? Is spending time in “team-building” common and seen as real “work?”

Conclusion

As you can see, there are a number of factors that lead to championship-level sports as summarized in this table.

FACTOR	SPORTS
Mindset toward “health”	Wellness
Source of results	Individuals
Purpose of “playing”	To take care of self
Goals and objectives	Clear
Roles and responsibilities	Clear
Accountability	Mutual
Communication	Constant and open
Rules	Clear, same for every game, enforcement objective
Role of coaches and leaders/managers	Coaches there for players
Training of coaches and leaders/managers	Extensive training in coaching
Ratio of practice to play	High practice to play

The most essential of these is the fundamental mindset—people in sports are constantly striving for “wellness”. They are always working at improving and striving for more vitality and excellence. It is this drive that sets the stage for sports players to carry out the other practices promoting championship play. If people in business want to be champions they must have the drive to pursue these practices in the same way. They must act proactively toward exceptional performance and success; and everyone must constantly work for the good of all. Is everyone in your organization doing everything they can to produce championship results. You are playing in one of the toughest games there is – business. Are you going to win the playoffs?

The author, Don Yates, founder of Extraordinary Organizations, helps organizations to have championship organizations. Whether you are starting a new team or have been in the game for a long time, he can help you, much like a sports coach. Together you will see that every one of your players is developing individually and that together they are “playing” at championship level. He can be reached at contact@extraordinaryorganizations.com and would be glad to talk with you about your situation. More information on Extraordinary Organizations is available at www.extraordinaryorganizations.com.

CHAMPIONSHIP RATING

FACTOR	To What Extent Do You Have This Factor? 1 – To a very little extent 3 – To some extent 2 – To a little extent 4 – To a great extent 5 – To a very great extent [Circle the appropriate number]				
Mindset toward “wellness” Constantly striving to be the best you can be	1	2	3	4	5
Source of results People are seen as the source of all results	1	2	3	4	5
Purpose of “playing” People know they are playing for their own benefit	1	2	3	4	5
Goals and objectives Goals and objectives are clear and measurable	1	2	3	4	5
Roles and responsibilities Roles and responsibilities and overlaps are clear	1	2	3	4	5
Accountability Everyone is accountable to everyone else	1	2	3	4	5
Communication Communication is constant and pervasive	1	2	3	4	5
Rules Rules are clear and apply equally to everyone	1	2	3	4	5
Role of leaders/managers Leaders and managers are there to help others win	1	2	3	4	5
Training of leaders/managers Leaders and managers are trained as leaders/managers	1	2	3	4	5
Ratio of practice to play Significant time is given to practicing	1	2	3	4	5
TOTALS					
TOTAL OF TOTALS					

Some questions for you to think about:

Is your score high enough to be a champion?

Is your score as high as you want it to be?

Would everyone agree with your scoring?

Would everyone agree with your answers to the first two questions?

If you did not answer each of these questions with a resounding, “Yes”, what are you going to do about it?